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PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHMO #2054/01 2001412
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 181412Z JUL 08
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9075
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUEHXD/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 002054

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/18/2018
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [CASC](#) [SOCI](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: MORMONS SUSPEND SENDING AMERICAN MISSIONARIES TO
RUSSIA

REF: A. 07 MOSCOW 4974
[1](#)B. MOSCOW 1252

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Margaret Hawthorne for reason
1.4(d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The LDS Church (Mormons) have suspended sending new missionaries to Russia, citing the financial and logistical difficulty of complying with new Russian visa regulations. The LDS Church, which currently has an estimated 450 missionaries in Russia, will now rely upon Russian and Ukrainian missionaries in Russia. All missionaries currently in Russia will continue their work here until the end of their assignments, which normally range from one to two years. The LDS Church will maintain its presence in Russia, where it is registered in eight regions covering congregations throughout the country. The LDS Church will continue to advocate for relaxing the restrictions affecting religious and humanitarian workers, and is prepared to resume sending missionaries from North America should this happen. End Summary.

Financial and Logistical Burdens Cited

[1](#)2. (U) On July 14, the LDS Missionary Department announced that henceforth it would meet its missionary needs in Russia with "those nationalities not needing visas," emphasizing that missionaries currently serving in Russia would not be withdrawn. The Missionary Department cited as the reason for its decision the changes to the Russian immigration law that limited missionaries and others on "humanitarian visas" to spending only 180 days of any one-year period in Russia, and requiring that they leave the country every 90 days (reftels).

[1](#)3. (C) Charles Cranny, President of the LDS Church Eastern Europe office, told us that complying with the new regulations had been financially and logistically difficult. He said that the LDS Church had 400-500 missionaries, mostly Americans, in Russia at any one time. The cost of flying them out of the country every 90 days to apply for a new visa, coupled with the time they had to spend away from their work, was too burdensome. Cranny said that the LDS Church had determined that it could continue its work by drawing on Russian and Ukrainian missionaries, and would reassign the American missionaries to other priority areas. "It is unfortunate that we and Russia are going to lose the benefit of the cross-cultural exchange, but the church leadership decided that this was not an effective use of our resources." The LDS Church will continue to operate eight regional offices that oversee missionaries in almost all of Russia's regions.

Several Options, None of them Good

[1](#)4. (C) Cranny said that the church had considered requesting work visas for its missionaries, but decided against it

because of the tax ramifications and the precedent that could harm its operations in other countries. "We also looked into getting a temporary residence permit, which would allow us to stay longer, but this came with geographic limitations on where the missionaries could work." Cranny and other AMCIT LDS Church leaders in Moscow, will remain on humanitarian visas and will continue to comply with the restrictions. He emphasized that the church policy prohibited doing anything that was not legal. He said that the church would continue to advocate relaxing the restrictions, and would resume sending missionaries from North America should this happen.

15. (C) Other religious groups, with fewer foreign personnel in Russia, have found other ways to deal with the new regulations. The Chief Rabbi of Moscow (a Swiss citizen) has obtained a work visa and residence permit instead of the humanitarian visa that he had used for years. The Salvation Army's foreign workers have work permits. An AMCIT representative of the Orthodox Church of America to the Moscow Patriarchate told us that he worked for one year on a work visa sponsored by an Orthodox charitable organization, but has since returned to the humanitarian worker visa. He told us that he has had no problems crossing the border into Russia several times, even though he has overstayed his visa. He acknowledged that his being an Orthodox Archpriest may ward off close scrutiny from the border guards.

Comment

16. (C) The October 2007 changes to the visa law have hampered religious organizations that rely on foreign missionaries; we know of no other church with as many foreign missionaries

here as the LDS Church. In the face of these regulations, there will be continued pressure on religious organizations to obtain work visa for foreign personnel, or replace those people with Russians, but to date no religious group has decided to withdraw from Russia.

BEYRLE